

# The COVID-19 Vaccine

## Receiving the vaccine

### When can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

The vaccine rollout and distribution will be determined by each state and the CDC has helped to set those guidelines.

In most cases, the rollout will go like this: 1) Frontline workers; 2) Individuals deemed as “high risk,” meaning they are of a certain age or have a particular health condition; 3) A general population rollout.

Check with your state and local health departments to see when the vaccine will be available to you.

### Once I’m eligible, how do I get a vaccine?

Once determined by your state guidelines, you can get your COVID-19 vaccine **free of charge** at a convenient location – like a local pharmacy.

Search for locations at [VaccineFinder.org](https://www.vaccinefinder.org) and remember, some vaccines require two doses to be effective. Make sure you get both.

### How long do I really have to wait to receive a vaccine? The timeline seems confusing.

For most Americans, it will take up to a full year for distribution. If there is an increase in production, that timeline could change.

### Do I need an appointment to receive the vaccine?

Once it’s your turn, yes, you’ll need to schedule an appointment. Find the nearest pharmacy here: [VaccineFinder.org](https://www.vaccinefinder.org).

## Does my doctor need to place an order for me to receive the vaccine?

No, you don't need a doctor's order to receive the vaccine. However, you'll most likely need to answer a series of questions at your pharmacy appointment.

## How can I stay safe until I receive the vaccine?

Until you're eligible for the vaccine, continue following safety guidelines: wear a face mask that covers your mouth and nose, social distance, and wash your hands frequently. Talk with your doctor and make sure you're up-to-date on all other recommended immunizations — including [your annual flu shot](#).

## How much will a COVID-19 vaccine cost?

Highmark members will receive the vaccine free of charge.

## Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

This pandemic has affected millions of Americans and vaccinating is the safest, most effective way to build protection against Coronavirus. Together, we can develop “herd immunity,” meaning roughly 70% of the population can fend off the disease. Ultimately, this will slow the spread.

## What if I'm young and healthy? Do I need the vaccine?

Yes. While your risk of serious illness decreases at a younger age, you could still carry Coronavirus and risk infecting other individuals. For example, you may carry the virus, experience no symptoms, but pass it along to immune-compromised friends or family. Don't put others health at risk. Together, we can eradicate Coronavirus.

## Does getting the vaccine really help my community?

It certainly does. When you get vaccinated, you help your friends, family, and community stay safe. Because of various diseases or severe allergies, some people can't get vaccinated. When you receive a COVID-19 vaccine, you're doing your part to keep our society safe and healthy.

## After I receive the vaccine, do I still have to wear a mask?

Yes, you do. Because the vaccine is being distributed in batches, it's important you continue to follow safety guidelines: wear a mask, social distance, and frequently wash your hands.

## If I have Coronavirus antibodies, do I need the vaccine?

Yes, you should still receive the vaccine. Many antibody tests are not specific enough to guarantee that you actually had Coronavirus.

## I had Coronavirus. Do I need the vaccine?

Yes, you should still receive the vaccine. The immunity gained from the vaccine may be longer-lasting than natural immunity from the infection

## I got my annual flu shot. Do I need the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes, you do. While the flu shot is a great way to protect yourself from the seasonal flu, it will not protect against Coronavirus.

## Is it mandatory to receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

Highmark strongly encourages both our employees and our members to receive the vaccine. While it is not mandatory, getting the vaccine will help protect yourself, your loved ones, and the community. You can help bring an end to this deadly pandemic.

# Vaccine Safety

## Once I'm eligible, should I get the vaccine? Is it safe?

It is highly recommended that you receive the vaccine when you can. The COVID-19 vaccine has gone through rigorous testing, received FDA approval, and been approved by several other countries worldwide. Together, we can eradicate Coronavirus from our society and keep everyone as safe as possible.

## What does emergency use authorization mean?

The FDA gave the COVID-19 vaccine what's called Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). With millions of Coronavirus cases in the United States alone, EUA was granted to distribute the vaccine as quickly as possible.

EUA does **not** mean that safety was compromised or that the vaccine somehow skipped deep analysis and testing. It simply means that this vaccine was prioritized above all others and that multiple steps worked in parallel together. It was a collaborative, all-in effort by the FDA to address this public health crisis and keep our communities safe.

## How does the COVID-19 vaccine work?

The COVID-19 vaccine is an mRNA vaccine. Traditionally, vaccines involve injecting an inactivate strand of a virus into our bodies. This then triggers an immune response and prepares our bodies for when the “real” virus comes.

On the other hand, the mRNA vaccine triggers an immune response through a strand of genetic material. This strand provides our bodies with Coronavirus “RNA instructions,” which ultimately trigger an immune response and allow our bodies to fight off the virus.

Using this new approach, leading pharmaceutical manufacturers are seeing over a 90% effective rate.

## What are the side effects of receiving the vaccine? Can I become infected with Coronavirus?

Like many other vaccines, trial participants noted mild to moderate symptoms — like soreness at the injection site or feeling slightly lethargic. The COVID-19 vaccine is an mRNA vaccine, which means it does not contain the virus. You cannot become infected with Coronavirus as a result of receiving the vaccine.

## I’m pregnant, should I get the vaccine?

The vaccine has not yet been tested in pregnant women and therefore there is no current recommendation.

## I have children, should they get vaccinated?

While many of the vaccine trials included some older children and teens, the vaccine is not yet approved for infants and children. The vaccine will likely be approved for this group at the end of 2021.

# About the COVID-19 Vaccine

## I heard Pfizer’s vaccine was approved. Will there be others available?

As of early December 2020, the FDA granted Emergency Use Authorization of the Pfizer vaccine. They are currently distributing millions of initial doses and will continue manufacturing additional doses in Michigan.

Several other companies are waiting for similar approval. We will provide updated information when we know more.

## How effective is the Pfizer vaccine?

Pfizer's vaccine is over 90% effective. For reference, the FDA set a bar that the vaccine must be at *least* 50% effective to be considered for authorization. Pfizer's is far surpassing that. For further perspective, annual flu vaccines are 40-60% effective, whereas the two doses of the measles vaccine are 97% effective.

## When will Pfizer's vaccine be available?

In most states, the Pfizer vaccine is only available to frontline workers. Each state will announce their specific rollout plan and details on general population vaccine distribution have not yet been determined.

## How does Pfizer's vaccine work?

To be effective, Pfizer's vaccine will be given in two separate doses, 21 days apart, with a two-day leeway on either end. That means you need to receive your second dose between 19 and 23 days after your first. When the vaccine is available to you, it's important you take the time to get **both** doses.